



Expanding Horizons

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The newsletter for friends of Adventures for Women

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Reminiscences of a Backpacker (or The Trials and Joys of Backpacking)



In May 2005 a group of us went on our first AFW sponsored backpacking trip. We were a hodgepodge group with borrowed gear, improper clothes, too much equipment and carried impossibly heavy loads. We slept overnight in temperatures that dropped, unexpectedly, to the thirties and woke to aching bodies. We were hooked! People tend to wonder why anyone in their right mind would carry 20-30 pounds on their back, sleep on the ground and use the nearest tree as their bathroom. Well, I've often wondered that myself but maybe it's the experiences we've had and the things we've learned. For example ...



Backpackers setting up camp

It's all about the toys! Shopping for gear is \$o much fun. I mu\$t have \$pent hour\$ at Campmor over the \$pan of a few weeks. You know you've bought too much \$tuff when they greet you by your fir\$ name. As Tammy says, a backpacker spends more on boots and clothes for backpacking than they do for work clothes and to us that seems perfectly sensible. The good thing is that for anyone interested in giving this a try, we have more than enough equipment to outfit you for a trial trip before your paycheck goes to "The Bank of Campmor."

Water. The MOST IMPORTANT THING. Never pass up a chance to collect water. We all have a level of comfort when treating water, some using filters, some using chemical, some a combination. We learned that in the winter you have to boil your water or melt snow and yes, you can burn snow! We've also learned that if the water is treated, just ignore the "floaties."

(Continued on following page.)

At Home on the Range

Saturday, April 21, was an ordinary day in Easton, PA until... 10 AFW members arrived at the target range at the Easton Fish and Game Association. The patient, experienced instructors doted on both novice and advanced shooters. The afternoon began with safety and gun handling instructions, followed by shooting, shooting, and yes, more shooting. With .22 caliber rifles and pistols, we took aim at the paper and metal animal targets that dared get in our way. Proudly, we left the range with hard evidence of our on-target (and off-target) aiming. The workshop was enjoyed by all!

Join us for the fall shooting workshop.



Rifle-toting women at Shooting Workshop

Reminiscences ... (Continued from previous page)

Food. Everything tastes gourmet when backpacking (it's amazing the meals we have come up with by just adding boiling water) and chocolate is a necessary part of gorp. Depending on the time of year, you get the best berries. On the Tunnel Hike in the summer, you can eat from one end to the other.

Bear Bags. Although a few have switched to canisters, most of us hang bear bags to keep our food away from the bears we've never seen. But this chore also provides comic relief and a chance to learn some new vocabulary.

Bathroom. This seems to be the one thing people have the most trouble with. "Does a bear sh-t in the woods?" Well, so do we but it does have a learning curve. For example, most of us use the "drip and shake" method for quick stops but a pantliner works great at catching that wayward drip. Also, the Leave No Trace concept suggests digging a hole for those "other" deposits. However, it seems that where you dig your hole and where your deposit lands never quite meet. I like the rock method. Do whatever, find a rock, cover the whatever. However, you must pack out your TP or baby wipes. Which brings me to specific summer/winter problems: #1-mosquitos do bite your butt. #2-baby wipes freeze. In the winter be sure your wipes are thawed before you assume the position otherwise you can "freeze you a—off!"

First Aid. Unfortunately, nothing is without its dangers but I have been hurt more walking around the block than on the trails. However, we've had sprained ankles, bruises, blisters and, one time, Sharalynn spilled boiling water on her foot two months before her wedding (she was grounded after that). Luckily no injury has caused an immediate evacuation but it did prompt some of us to take a course in Wilderness First Aid. But mostly we've learned to be careful and, most important, to know our limitations. After all, we may be crazy but we're not stupid.

People you meet. You can meet the most "interesting (read 'stupid')" people and the nicest. It's amazing how many people will hike without



Into the woods we go

maps and water. Lori rescued a couple and their dog who got lost, without water, in Ramapo. Mary prevented the divorce of a couple hiking the wrong way in Harriman at 5:00 at night (she still gets e-mails from them). Water and directions were given to another couple who didn't know their way out of Harriman. It's gotten to the point where extra water and maps are packed for all the "interesting" people. But we've also met the nicest people. The family cooking lunch at a shelter in Harriman who left us with roasted sweet potatoes and another day hiker who, when he heard we were staying the night, gathered fire wood and left it for us. We also met Murphy (no not Dagi) who cleaned up our mess when dinner was accidentally spilled on the ground. He was soooooo cute and friendly and loved to have his ears scratched. Cutest Scottish Terrier! I shouldn't forget the snowshoer wearing a thong but that's another story!

Not every trip is all fun. The second trip led by Mary and Dagi was uphill both ways (I don't care what the map says) in 500 degree heat. Fortunately Priscilla appeared like a vision bearing liquid gold — she met us with ice cold water at the end of that trip. We bailed, literally, when the Columbus Day 2005 trip had to be interrupted due to flooding, turning trails into waterfalls and valleys into lakes. Thunderswamp Trail trip was cut short with sprains and burns but we were able to get out easily with the help of friendly and compassionate locals. Actually, we found a motorist who was lost and we had a map so we traded a ride for directions. We've hiked in the winter where the hardest thing is getting out of a nice warm sleeping bag in the morning and butt sliding takes on a whole new meaning. But through it all we've had fun and most of all we've learned.

We've learned how to handle heat and cold, drought and floods, bugs and snakes and come out laughing. We've learned the importance of water and food and how unimportant a change of clothes really is. We've learned more about our own bodies, our expectations and limitation and our relationship to each other and nature than I ever thought possible. We've learned to be independent while relying on each other at the same time and to realize that anything we do directly affects those around us. We learned to take care — of ourselves and each other. We've learned to be strong and self-sufficient while being humble in the face of nature and, as Tammy pointed out to me this winter, we've learned a deeper respect for the pioneers who traversed the frontier. We've taken winter camping seminars with EMS and AMC. We've taken Wilderness First Aid courses.

But the question still remains, why do we do this? Is it that being out there and having everything reduced to how you can survive with only 25 lbs. on your back *does* tend to put things in perspective? Or is it the peaceful woods, beautiful sunsets and sunrises, a mesmerizing campfire or quiet conversation? Or seeing deer up close, recognizing coyote tracks and bear scat (without seeing the bears thank you)? Maybe it's being on top of a mountain and feeling small or being on top of a mountain and saying "I did it!" Lori says it's the way people back up from you ever so slightly when you tell them what you're doing for the weekend, especially in the winter! Or as Mary says, "Because we can."

Come join us — it's an amazing experience.

Jackie Rubenacker

Heading Off to a New Adventure

Amita Patel, an ardent AFW hiker and backpacker, is taking a "leave of absence" from AFW's activities for the next 12 months for a very worthy cause. She has accepted an Americorps position at the Montana Credit Union for Community Development in Missoula, MT. She will be working with the



"Building Security through Assets and Financial Education" program which offers matched savings accounts to low-income survivors of domestic violence and allows them to use their saved money for education, opening a business, or buying a home.

Amita joined AFW in June 2006, attracted by our schedule offering backpacking weekends and numerous hikes. Over the past year, she has been spotted many a time on the trails with her fellow AFW backpackers — the youngest among them and the only one with a bear canister attached to her backpack, lots of water (hence her nickname "5 Lita (as in liter) Amita", fondly bestowed by her fellow backpackers) and sporting a multi-colored bandana (her trademark). As she puts it, "It was through joining AFW and hiking and backpacking with such great women that pushed me to seek new adventures. I am very sad to leave AFW though I look forward to working and hiking the trails in Montana."

We wish Amita all the best in her new venture. Those of us who have hiked and backpacked with her will miss her company. We look forward to hearing about her adventures, both on and off the Montana trails, and to hiking with her again in 12 months' time. Good luck, Amita!

An Afternoon on the Lehigh

The sun was out, a breeze was blowing and the waters were calm ... perfect conditions for 10 novice paddlers as we ventured out on the Lehigh River during the first of three AFW paddling workshops offered this spring and summer.

Wearing life jackets (a must!) hats, sunglasses, and water shoes, we steered our kayaks and canoes down the river a bit timidly at first, but quite confidently by the end of the day. Along the way, we stopped for a leisurely lunch on a small island, and later cooled off with a quick dip in the river. Not only did we learn to paddle and steer, but we also learned how to unload, reload and strap down the kayaks on the racks of the car roofs. Our legs had the day off, but our arms had a good workout!

It was a most interesting and delightful way to spend an afternoon, and we hope you will join us on AFW's next series of paddling workshops.



Cherry Blossoms and Sweat Shops / AFW CITY PATHS



City Paths -- Lunchbreak on the Branch Brook Park Walk

AFW's City Paths continues to expand our horizons. Here are two very divergent worlds we explored this spring.

The Branch Brook Park Walk in Newark was scheduled for mid-April when the cherry blossoms were to be at their peak. Unfortunately, the cold weather delayed the blossoms, and the buds were not quite open. In spite of the lack of cherry blossoms, the group still had a very pleasant time walking around and exploring other aspects of the Park. We stopped for lunch at a Portuguese restaurant and the good food and good conversations more than made up for the absent blossoms.

On Mothers' Day we went to **lower Manhattan** for a guided tour of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. Nine AFW members learned about the hard life of immigrant families in the late 1800s and early 1900s, cramped in close quarters that served as home and garment factories. After the tour, we returned to the 21st century, walked across part of the Brooklyn Bridge, had lunch at South Street Seaport and strolled the esplanade by the Hudson River. It was a most enjoyable outing!

For Harriman Fans

At some point in time, an AFW hiker has been a Harriman State Park hiker. Whether you're an occasional hiker of its trails and peaks, or a frequent one, you'll enjoy the following poem.

For the more familiar, it's a virtual tour all around the Park. For the less familiar, it presents a good opportunity to pull out your Harriman Bear Mountain Trails maps and see if you can find your way around the poem. But for all, there will be moments when you'll pause and say to yourself, "Oh yes, I was there." Happy "hiking" to all!



The View From The Summit

By Chris Connolly

Happy the Harriman hikers who take to the trail
Health in mind and body shall be theirs without fail
Away from Reeves Meadow hubbub up Rockland's Seven Hills
And Old Red to Ramapo Torne with serpentine lair and scramble spills
Pass by a Bear who must be Russian and a Pulpit without a priest
Pine Meadow Lake's the spot for summer dip with luncheon feast
Peer at Diamond's Sebago views and careen down Cascade of Slid
Plod Blue Disc to a Den where bad Claudius Smith once hid
Yet ahead greet Tom Jones to Stahahe of High Peak renown
Yonder cross Island Pond in winter if in Boston Mine you don't drown

Next if you meet Times Square throngs you're no old geezer
Not if you've just stretched your limbs AT Lemon Squeezer
Enough of Skannatati, over LP and SBM continue your trip
Eat not the Irish Potato and ascend precipitous Pingyp
West Mountain ridgeline lies ahead as you begin to limp
Welcome are hallowed Hudson scenes once you top the Timp

You can take a detour up Dunderberg's Escalator
You'll dally in Doodletown's ghost village sooner or later
End of journey awaits once you've tramped to Perkins Tower
Elation at divine grandeur though you've used up muscle-power
Always when spirits flag the forest footpaths beckon
At all times and in all seasons the best healer, I do reckon

Source: *The Ramapough*, Winter 2007 (Newsletter of the Adirondack Mountain Club-Ramapo Chapter)

MacEvoy Trail Clean-up a Success!

Helping our Planet. Thank you to all the energetic participants on this year's spring clean-up. Give a hand to Stacey Askew, Jen Bukosky, Sook-Kuen Chang, Sandy Francisco, Nancy Meredith, Diane Moscaritolo, Sandy Norman, Amita Patel, Jackie Rubenacker plus grandchildren, and Linda Suarez. Come out to this fall's clean-up for fun, sun, beautiful scenery and a good cause.

The "Thinking" Sport

That's what six AFW members were deeply engrossed in for a few hours one morning last March... "orienteering", often called the "thinking sport" because it involves map-reading and decision-making in addition to a great workout.

At the workshop offered for the first time by AFW, we learned the basics of reading a compass and an orienteering map, and determining and following a bearing. With these newly-acquired skills, we set off in two separate groups to chart our course, hike and bushwack through the woods to find a series of distinct points shown on the map, and get back to the finish in the shortest amount of time.

There was always the possibility (and danger!) of the tiniest bit of inexact course charting that would lead either group way off-course, but fortunately the workshop leaders and guardian angels for the day, Priscilla and Mary, somehow always managed to appear just in time to nudge us back on course. It was fun, challenging and very satisfying, both physically and mentally!

Look out for the next Orienteering Workshop ... and be sure to try this sport.



Charting our course at the Orienteering Workshop

Updates and Alerts

Be sure to check the Home Page of our website regularly for changes and additions to the Adventure Schedule.

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Welcome New Members

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